

# MANAGER/SUPERVISORS

## GUIDE

### ON

# HOW TO RECOGNISE THE POTENTIAL FOR A TARGETED THREAT OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

**Developed by:**

*Workplace Health and Safety,  
BC Public Service Agency  
and  
The Government Security Office*

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## ***Targeted Threats of Violence***

There may be times that both staff and the workplace are faced with a possible targeted threat of violence. This threat may be communicated through: a call from an employee, client or another party identifying an incident, a discipline/termination process, or a direct threat made by another person.

This guide is intended to assist the manager/supervisor to identify:

- individuals who may pose a risk of a targeted threat of violence in the workplace, and
- appropriate responses and actions.

**Definition of Targeted Threat:** Any planned act, or expression of intent to plan to inflict physical or other harm against a person or a workplace. A threat can be spoken, written, symbolic or conveyed by gesture.

While it is impossible to accurately predict whether or not a person will commit a planned or premeditated act of violence, the presence of warning signs can alert us to an increased risk. It is important to note that not everyone who exhibits these warning signs will become violent in fact statistically, very few people pursue targeted violence.

Research into incidents of targeted workplace violence has shown that the potentially violent person exhibits characteristics or signs prior to any violent act. Understanding these signs, recognising when they occur and acting on this knowledge and recognition are vital steps in mitigating a potentially serious situation.

The following pages provide identifiers for possible targeted threats of violence for both internal and external threats and provide guidance in how all managers/supervisors can assist in the management of a targeted threat scenario.

### **Background**

The BC Public Service Agency (BCPSA) and the Government Security Office (GSO), have jointly developed a comprehensive program to manage Threats of Targeted Violence in BC Public Service workplaces.

This guide is a key component to effective management of the overall program and managers/supervisors are seen as essential players in that process by helping your Ministry ensure the safety of staff.

Please provide any suggestions to improve this document, or make it more user-friendly, to [governmentsecurityoffice@gov.bc.ca](mailto:governmentsecurityoffice@gov.bc.ca)

We thank you for your support and participation.

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## ***Definitions***

*As it pertains to this document:*

**Assessment:** The collection and objective review of information to determine the level of threat of violence posed by an individual or group.

**TTVMP:** Targeted Threat of Violence Management Program

**Domestic Violence in the Workplace:** Targeted threat to a BC Public Service employee by a family member, household, or intimate relationship that has the potential of taking place at the employee's workplace causing harm to the employee or others in the workplace.

**EFAS:** Employee and Family Assistance Services – Morneau Shepell.

**External Threat:** Targeted threat from non-BC Public Service employee(s) e.g.: tax payer, ex-employee, client, inmate, ex-inmate, gang member.

**Imminent:** About to happen – anticipate it will occur soon.

**Internal Threat:** Targeted threat from an employee(s) or contractor of the BC Public Service.

**Subject:** Person making the threat.

**Targeted Threat:** means any planned act, or expression of intent to plan to inflict physical or other harm against a person or a workplace. A threat can be spoken, written, symbolic or gesture e.g. finger across the throat, dead animal left on the doorstep.

**Target:** Person(s) identified as at risk as a result of the threat.

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## ***External Threat***

External threats can come in several forms and from a diversity of persons. It could be:

- A disgruntled client who is unhappy with how a file is being handled and feels s/he is being unfairly treated
- A group that does not agree with how the government is managing a particular issue
- Domestic violence in the workplace
- Someone who targets the BC Public Service

Currently our experience has found, the most common of the four is the person who feels unfairly treated.

Examples of an external targeted threat:

- Verbal or written threat to physically harm an employee(s) or others within the BC Public Service.
- Verbal or written threat to set explosives, cause fire or through other harmful/damaging means to BC Public Service worksite(s) and employees.
- An employee's spouse, partner, boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-spouse, who is not a BC Public Service employee, has threatened to do harm to the employee, which may result in domestic violence in the workplace.

Refer to [page 7](#) for suggested actions for Targeted Threats of Violence.

***IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT  
CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY***

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## ***Internal Threat***

As with external threats, internal threats can come in several forms. It could be a disgruntled employee who is:

- Unhappy with her/his work environment or the actions of the supervisor or co-worker(s)
- In disagreement with a disciplinary process against her/him
- An employee who may choose to target the workplace

## ***Determination Steps***

If changes in an employee's normal demeanour (as listed below in Table 1) are observed, managers/supervisors should consider:

- The presence of **personal or work-related stressors** that may be affecting that employee's interactions with other employees.
- The likelihood this employee might pose a **risk of harm to themselves or others**.

The following steps are a guide to a course of review/action. Managers/supervisors should exercise good judgement on the appropriateness of each step in relation to the circumstances of each situation.

## ***Confidentiality***

It is important to discuss any potential indicators in a confidential and sensitive way. The risk of the person in question acting in an undesirable manner may increase if concerns are not treated confidentially. Additionally, if an assessment team is required, they will achieve the best results if the work environment has not been filled with rumours and speculation. This will ensure that all employees are treated in a fair and respectful manner.

## ***Immediate Manager/Supervisor***

The immediate manager/supervisor should be cognisant of direct and indirect warning signs. The following are changes in normal demeanour that can either identify personal problems (indirect) that are less likely to result in harm to others or be a precursor to the potential risk of violence (direct) resulting in harm to others.

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**Table 1: Direct and Indirect Warning Signs**

| Indirect:   | Direct:   |
|---|---|
| <p>These changes in normal demeanour <b>may not signal the potential risk of violence</b>. Instead they may result from the worker feeling ill, or a personal or family crisis. This may temporarily change the worker’s work/social performance, but not suggest any risk of harm to others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sudden mood swings, outbursts or sudden refusals to comply with rules or to perform duties</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> An increase in rude or abusive behaviour</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A change in the employee’s personality/behaviour at work (e.g. an outgoing employee becomes withdrawn)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorating relationships with co-worker and supervisor</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Possible drug or alcohol abuse</li> </ul> <p>You should discuss these behaviour/performance indicators with the employee. If an employee is dealing with a personal crisis as described above, then support and possibly professional help may be needed. Advise the employee of resources available through the <a href="#">Employee and Family Assistance Services</a> (EFAS) –Morneau Shepell.</p> <p>If you need assistance in this process contact the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email AskMyHR: <a href="http://www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact">www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact</a></p> <p><b>If any of the “indirect” indicators are combined with the “direct” then immediately contact the BC Public Service</b></p> <p><b>OHS Emergency Line 1-250-952-0911</b></p> | <p>The following warning indicators are more serious and <b>may signal a potential risk of violence</b>. These indicators may or may not be accompanied by some of the –Indirect indicators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Previous direct or indirect threats of harm to a co-worker or others</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subject’s identification with people who use violence to solve problems</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subject’s indications of desperation to the point of discussion and/or threats to harm others and/or self</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subject carries a weapon or indicates access to weapons</li> </ul> <p>Proceed immediately to contacting the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email AskMyHR: <a href="http://www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact">www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact</a></p> <p><b>OHS Emergency line 1-250-952-0911</b></p> <p>Note: If your ministry has an internal Occupational Safety Manager/Advisor or a Ministry Security Officer, then s/he should be contacted as well.</p> |

***IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN  
CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY***

## ***Suggested Actions for Targeted Threats of Violence***

If you believe there is a risk of targeted violence, then discuss the situation with a senior manager. It is important to only involve those persons necessary to assist in the analysis, mitigation and management of the threat. Too many persons becoming involved in a communication chain may hinder an effective assessment.

Key persons to involve:

- The BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email [MyHR@gov.bc.ca](mailto:MyHR@gov.bc.ca)
- Your Regional OS Specialist, BC Public Service Agency (contact by [MyHR](#))
- Your [Ministry Security Officer](#)
- Your Ministry's OSH Manager/Advisor (if you have one).
- When appropriate, the Shop Steward or Union Representative (generally this will be done on the recommendation of the TTVMP)

The TTVMP will conduct a targeted threat of violence analysis to determine the level of threat and make recommendations on mitigation strategies.

**Note:** The basics of threat management are to take early and certain action, therefore when issues arise, especially those with indicators of a potential threat of targeted violence, they must be addressed immediately. If a response to potential violence issues is cursory or delayed, it can wrongly give an impression that these behaviours are acceptable and allow the problem to continue. Aggressive or violent behaviour is unacceptable at all times.

***IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN  
CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY***

### ***Questions:***

If you have any questions pertaining to targeted threats of violence please contact The BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email AskMyHR: [www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact](http://www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact) or [Government Security Office, Risk Management Branch](#)

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## ***Potential Suicide***

### Imminent Suicide Threat/Employee Suddenly Leaves Work

NOTE: Imminent means 'about to happen'. Questions to ask:

- Are you thinking of suicide?
- If yes, how would you do it?
- Do you have what you need to do it?
- When are you thinking of doing it?

Risk is high (imminent) if "yes" or immediate intent is indicated to any 2 of the above plus despair or hopelessness.

An additional risk factor is the feeling of despair or hopelessness.

Call 9-1-1.

The supervisor, or other concerned individual, will need to provide the operator with details of their concern, including: name of employee, date of birth, home address, phone number, and emergency contact details (if they have these). If all the tombstone data is not available, still call 911 while continuing to gather the information.

If the threat of suicide is imminent (you have instructed the client to call 911) and there is concern for the safety of others, or the situation is unfolding while you are engaged with the client, call (250) 952-0911 (Occupational Safety).

### Non-imminent Suicide Threat/Concern

NOTE: With a non-imminent situation, statements may be made but not a time frame or a plan. These statements can include comments of despair such as:

- I have nothing to live for
- I don't care if I am here tomorrow or gone
- I want to kill myself but can't seem to do it
- They may have physical signs such as cutting to forearms

Listen, comfort, be gentle and supportive, kind and understanding.

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Employee at Work: The supervisor, or other concerned individual, should call 1-800-655-5004 and ask for Short-Term Counselling on behalf of the employee (aka make a 'warm referral'), then allow for privacy. The employee needs to be present when the call is made.

Employee Off-Site/Off Work/On Work Disability: The supervisor, or other concerned individual, should connect the employee with Short-Term Counselling services by providing them with the number: 1-800-655-5004, choose Option 1. A concerned supervisor or other concerned individual also has the option of setting up a party line call, where when they are on the phone with the employee they indicate their concern, they bring in the Short-Term Counselling provider (1-800-655-5004, Option 1), and do a warm handover to a crisis counsellor.

Another option for connecting an off-site employee with crisis support is through an 'outreach call.' In this case the supervisor or other concerned individual would suggest this option to the employee. If the employee agrees, the concerned party would call 1-800-655-5004, Option 1, request an outreach call, and provide the employee's name, contact number, and a window of time in which to reach them. A counsellor will make three attempts to reach the employee, to provide stabilisation and create a safety plan.

The employee should also be advised of the Crisis Line number, 1-800-784-2433.

When a suicide threat/attempt occurs during a period of work disability OR a sick leave arises as a result of a suicide threat/attempt, contact an Occupational Health Nurse (OHN) after the acute risk has been managed as above. Advise the employee that an OHN will be informed of this issue (the voiced threat) and it will be included in case management processes. OHNs can also be accessed through two main reception phone lines: (250) 952-4228 (Victoria) or (604) 660-2587 (Vancouver). However, to know if a service issue has been resolved, submit a ticket. Within that ticket, the OHN will acknowledge receipt and that they will connect with the employee of concern.

## ***How to Contact Us***

- [AskMyHR](#) Online Service Request:
  - [www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact](http://www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact)
  - 250-952-6000 or Toll Free 1-877-277-0772 (Mon-Fri, 8-4:30pm PST)
- Occupational Safety Specialists, BC Public Service Agency
- [Ministry Security Officers](#)
- Occupational Safety 24 hour emergency phone contact  
1-250-952-0911

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## ***Resources***

### **MyHR**

- [BCPSA Occupational Safety](#)
  - [Sample Telephone Threat Checklist](#)
  - [Guide: Recommended Best Practices Developed for Co-Located Ministry Worksites on Delivering Service To Clients That Exhibit Unacceptable Behaviour](#)
  - [Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting](#)
  - [Travelling To and From Work and Client's Offices](#)
  
- [Address a Respectful Workplace Issue](#)
- [Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace](#)
- [Health Issues – LifeSpeak Video Library](#)
  - Having Difficult Conversation with Confidence
  - Mental Health in the Workplace for Managers
  
- [Employee and Family Assistance Services \(EFAS\)–Moreau Shepell](#)
  - 1-800-655-5004 (24hrs)
  - People Leader Advice Line – for Managers

### **General Incident or Loss Report ([GILR](#))**

**WorkSafeBC** - [Domestic Violence in the Workplace](#) (see Resource Toolkit)

## ***Training***

### **BCPSA Learning and Education**

- OHS Violence Prevention Seminar: Practical Skills (classroom)
- Managing Conflict (on-line)
- Developing Skills for Effective Conflict Resolution (classroom)

### **Justice Institute of BC**

- [Threat Awareness](#) (on-line)

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